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ABSTRACT

Sacramento City College's Assessment Center was created in response to growing numbers of students arriving at the college without basic verbal skills and a lack of uniform testing standards. Since its creation, the Center has undertaken research studies to provide objective evidence as to the nature of the student population to be served by the curriculum offerings of the college. Data from fall 1982 studies revealed that: (1) 60.1% of incoming and returning students needed support help in reading: (2) 1,577 students needed reading improvement, but only 385 were enrolled in reading classes at the end of the semester; (3) there was a parallel between the reading profiency levels of students who dropped courses and those who stayed in courses but received unsatisfactory grades; (4) students with the lowest median reading scores were more likely to drop courses; (5) students who had taken assessment tests for placement into appropriate courses were less likely to drop the courses than unassessed students; and (6) students reading below the 10th grade level had very little chance of receiving a C grade or better, except in classes created to meet specific learning skill needs. As the database provided by the Assessment Center grows, it will permit a narrowing of the gap between the defined needs of the students and the curriculum offerings of the college. A summary of spring 1983 Assessment Center research findings is appended. (HB)

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ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT AT SACRAMENTO CITY COLLEGE

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SACRAMENTO CITY COLLEGE
Assessment Center

April 15, 1983

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SACRAMENTO CITY COLLEGE
Assessment Center
April 15, 1983

ASSESSMENT AND PLACEMENT AT SACRAMENTO CITY COLLEGE

The creation of an assessment center represents a challenge when all the educational, philosophical, and financial elements inherent in such an undertaking are considered.

As the result of an open enrollment policy and the thrust toward recruitment, in 1977, Sacramento City College found that it was attracting an increasing number of students who lacked the basic verbal skills to succeed in traditional college level courses.

Without some type of placement activity, students were found to be entering courses in which they had limited chance of success due to lack of preparation and this was determined to be unconscionable.

The usual counseling/placement procedures of using high school grades to predict success in English skill classes was complicated by grade inflation. The use of national exams such as ACT and SAT was found to be ineffective because of the lack of applicable information at the lower levels of ability.

Although no assessment is required for admission to Sacramento City College, there was a proliferation of departmental use of assessment instruments on the Sacramento City College campus with an attendant lack of budgetary control, lack of uniform testing standards, and a dearth of supervision. All of these factors emphasized a need for change. The change was the Assessment Center.

No assessment/placement process can become credible nor can curriculum changes be effected without objective evidence as to the nature of the student population which is to be served. The "gut feelings" of faculty simply cannot close the gap between student competence levels and what faculty divines to be the students' needs. Until objective evidence regarding reading/grammar levels is evaluated, and courses are created to meet defined needs, then the battle against student failure and attrition cannot begin.

The objective evidence revealed by the assessment sample for Fall 1982 which included some 54% of entering freshmen revealed that 60.11% of our incoming and returning students needed support help in reading.

The levels of competency by grade levels were as follows:

GRADE LEVEL	NUMBER	PERCENT
13+	1,781	39.89
12 - 12.9	463	10.37
11 - 11.9	432	9.68
10 - 10.9	826	18.50
9 - 9.9	222	4.97
7 - 8.9	256	5.73
1 - 6.9	485	10.86
TOTAL	4,465*	100.0

The range of students in the various grade levels has remained more or less static over the last 7 semesters, but a radical shift into the top (13th year) range in the Fall of 1982 seems to have been the result of including the Occupational Technology programs under the assessment/placement process.

The scope and impact of the assessment/placement process is quite visible when one realizes that some 98% of the students enrolled in English 1A were placed according to scores and class placement procedures. There is a direct correlation between the scores and attained grades. That is, the higher the raw scores attained in both reading and grammar, the higher the grades in English 1A.

This consistent correlation was most evident in the reading scores, and there is growing statistical evidence that proficiency in reading may play a more important role in success in English composition grade attainment than do composition skills.

The Language Division placement criteria directed 1,097 students into English 55, 832 students into English 56, and 996 students into English 57-60. This placement of a total of 1,929 students in Level 1 (English 55 + 56 - learning skills area) reveals an increased emphasis on our basic support program with a resulting increase in the need for additional tutorial support and subsequent funding.

*Total does not include 13 students who completed the English section of the TASK only.

The retention rates found in the English composition classes which range from 79.7% to 83.1% reflect the efficacy of correct placement in those classes under the assessment/placement process. This is almost unbelievable when one considers that many students in the learning skills classes are often high risk students.

There were 1,577 students in need of reading improvement, but only 389 students were in the reading classes at the end of the semester. This represents a 11.8% increase over the comparable period and reflects the extent of the redirection process used with students.

The problem of attrition is being approached in such a way that a data base is being constituted in areas other than English classes with the end result being that placement scores have been established. Temporary redirection into support classes seems to help in mainstreaming and retaining the students.

The Center began a study of the reading proficiency levels possessed by students in selected courses in order to begin describing the academic nature of the students who drop classes during the 1st - 4th weeks and the 5th - 18th week periods.

It is becoming increasingly difficult for a student reading below a 10th grade level to pass any course included in this survey. This cross-section may well have applications to other curriculum areas where similar academic standards exist.

The following summary is composed of grade levels as determined by TASK reading scores.

	READING LEVEL FOR:			
	DROPS: WEEK 1 - 4	DROPS: WEEK 5 - 18	READING LEVEL FOR "C" GRADE	COMPOSITE READING LEVEL FOR A, B, & C GRADES
Admin. of Justice 51	9.6	10.6	10.9	12.6
" " " 52	10.7	10.7	10.3	10.9
Aeronautics	10.2	10.7	11.0	13+
Art 10	10.5	9.9	11.3	12.6
Chemistry 1A	12.9	12.6	13.0	13+
Cosmetology 50	7-8	9.3	10.0	10.8
Economics 1A	12.0	11.9	12.0	12.6
English 1A	13+	13+	13+	13+
" 57	11.6	12.0	11.9	12.0

	READING LEVEL FOR: DROPS: WEEK 1 - 4	DROPS: WEEK 5 - 18	READING LEVEL FOR "C" GRADE	COMPOSITE READING LEVEL FOR A, B, & C GRADES
English 56	10.7	10.7	10.6	10.7
" 55	7-8	7-8	7-8	9.3
" 72	12.6	12.0	10.9	12.3
" 70	6.9	6.9	6.9	6.9
" 71	10.4	10.2	10.3	10.5
Family Consumer Science 10	10.7	10.7	10.8	11.9
History 17	10.9	11.6	12.9	13.0
Humanities 1	11.3	11.6	11.6	12.9
Philosophy 6	12.6	12.6	12.0	13.0
Political Science 1	11.6	11.6	12.9	13+
Psychology 1	11.9	11.3	11.9	12.9
Sociology 1A	10.6	11.3	10.9	12.3
Math. W	9.9	10.0	10.1	10.4
Math. X	10.9	11.0	11.3	11.3

The nature of the "drop" students is becoming much clearer. There is a parallel occurring between the reading proficiency levels of students who drop and those students who are retained in the classes and eventually receive unsatisfactory grades. The student with the lowest median reading score seems to drop. These students if they remained in class would have little opportunity to succeed with a passing grade.

The reading proficiency level possessed by the student who dropped during the 5th - 18th week was equal in many instances to the reading proficiency levels possessed by students who earned a "D" or other unsatisfactory grades.

In the instances of Administration of Justice 51 only 28.6% of the students who dropped in the 1st - 4th week were assessed. The balance (71.4%) were unassessed. In the 5th - 18th week drop period 51.6% of the drops were unassessed.

This is a most important finding when it is related to the effect of assessment upon student retention. The assessed student does not drop classes as often as do the unassessed student. It may be that the assessment process

helps students in the process of selecting suitable courses and majors which are consistant with defined competencies.

In summarizing this phase of the research, several important findings surfaced: (1) the student reading below a 10th grade level has very little chance of receiving a "C" grade or better in any class except classes which were created to meet specific learning skill needs; (2) to program students who are reading in the low 10th grade reading level into a "transfer" program does not lead to academic success or retention; (3) the assessed student who drops classes possesses reading proficiency levels equal to the student who invariably receives an "unsatisfactory" course grade; (4) the assessed student is less likely to drop a class or will more often be retained in a class longer than the unassessed student; and (5) the "INC" student often possesses a high reading proficiency level which in some instances approximate those levels of the "A" student, but the causes of the "INC" are unknown.

Since only student movement during the 1st - 4th week, 5th - 18th week and the end of the semester results were analyzed, there was little information about the nature of the students who received an "INC" grade. The nature of the competency level of such students will constitute another research project.

The English as a Second Language program had an assessment data base of 96%. Research in Fall 1982 compared Michigan raw scores to student success in grade achievement and the students with the higher assessment scores were properly placed into a homogeneous environment and the student with the highest scores received the highest course grades.

The Higher Education Learning Package, an academic core program which had 95.5% assessment, showed again that the higher the score in reading, the higher the letter grade received at the semester end. The English scores revealed a problem between the "D" and "INC" grade levels, but attendance was a component for the awarding of final grades.

The assessment process was able to deliver 170 students into the Fall 1982 H.E.L.P. program which is aimed at the 8th - 10th grade reading level. The students who were placed ranged from the 9.9 - 11th grade levels.

Research topics conducted for staff and administration have included a statistical evaluation of the effectiveness of English courses in the learning skills areas of the curriculum ladder, the status of mathematics assessment,

the effectiveness of reading scores in placing students in Speech classes, the effectiveness of a waiver system, the establishment of campus norms on nationally normed reading instrument, the definition of competencies needed by the academically successful students as well as the level of competencies possess by the "drop" students, the effect of assessment on student movement from and between course offerings, and the need for additional course offerings to accommodate the defined academic needs of students.

Each semester as the data base grows, more information is becoming available concerning our student population. There seems to be a gap between the defined needs of students and the curriculum offerings of the college. As the gap closes retention rates will soar and credibility regarding the curricular offerings of any Community College will rise in direct ratio.

It is hoped that when the next report is issued there will be a substantive increase in professional involvement in the utilization of the information which is becoming available campus wide. The impact of this information on faculty as well as management has resulted in an immediate response. The concept of demand scheduling is beginning to evolve as one way to serve the academic needs of our diverse student population.

Further information regarding research procedures and results is available by contacting M. Haase, Assessment Coordinator, or P. Caffrey, Assistant Assessment Coordinator, Sacramento City College, 3835 Freeport Boulevard, Sacramento, California 95822.

ASSESSMENT AT SACRAMENTO CITY COLLEGE

SPRING, 1983

The Sacramento City College Assessment Center provides the following services to the college staff: (1) issues an analysis of student reading and composition competencies on a bi-annual basis; (2) suggests new and/or additional course offerings to accommodate defined students' needs; (3) conducts research as to the effect which assessment/placement activities have upon student retention and success; and (4) provides a standard for the organization and administration of the assessment programs used in outreach and community related educational programs.

Research has had an impact upon management, staff and students. It has made available objective and accurate information to all facets of the college.

Several important findings are surfacing as the results of the research effort are analyzed:

1. When students base academic decisions on objective measurement criteria, retention and academic success are increased.
2. Assessment makes it possible to define the reading, English, and mathematic competency levels needed for success in any college course.
3. Students can be redirected with a high degree of certainty that the courses they take before mainstreaming increase chances of success.
4. Trends and curriculum changes can be predicted.
5. Reading competency has been found to be a better predictor of academic success in most courses, but mathematics competency levels are better predictors of academic success in most occupational classes.
6. Technical students have as high or even higher reading and mathematics competency levels than self-declared transfer students.
7. The lower proficiency levels possessed by technical students are not as low as the lowest levels possessed by some of the transfer students.
8. It is better to teach reading in the subject matter areas rather than in isolation such as individual reading classes.
9. Unassessed students tend to drop or change classes more than assessed students.
10. In connection with success rates of students it was found that it takes a high 10th grade reading level to receive a "C" grade in the college courses included in the data base (Fall 1982).
11. Diagnostic competencies of students enrolled in learning skill courses can help in prescribing remediation activities. (These activities will increase academic efficiency and accountability.)
12. Research has not defined the reasons why students who possess high reading and mathematics proficiency levels receive D, F, and Inc. grades. Student information as to why this phenomenon exists has been found to be unreliable.
13. Research into the reliability of an exiting essay administered by the English department in the pre 1A course to predict academic success in English 1A reveals that 89% of the students who received satisfactory scores passed English 1A, but such research represented only 9% of the total data base.
14. Students who use a waiver system to by-pass the established assessment/placement process used for English 1A have an academic success rate of 27.91%.

Further information regarding research procedures and results is available by contacting M. Haase, Assessment Coordinator, Sacramento City College, 3835 Freeport Boulevard, Sacramento, California 95822.

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